

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-10 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-14

USIA-04 ACDA-10 IO-03 DRC-01 /071 W

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R 091804Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4672

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

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AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION OUTLOOK -- SCOTLAND REVISITED

REF: (A) LONDON 12324; (B) LONDON 13038

SUMMARY: OCTOBER 7-8 VISIT BY EMBOFF TO SCOTLAND REVEALED  
ELECTION OUTLOOK THERE IS CONFUSED AND UNCERTAIN. THREE  
FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THIS SITUATION: LEVEL OF UNDECIDED  
VOTERS APPROACHING 20 PERCENT; INCONSISTENT VOTER TRENDS  
AT CONSTITUENCY LEVEL; AND PRONOUNCED EROSION OF TRADI-  
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TIONAL TORY VOTE. AS A RESULT, POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE

HESITANT TO FORECAST PROBABLE ELECTION OUTCOME IN PRECISE NUMBERS OF SEATS. HOWEVER, THERE SEEMS TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT LABOR SHOULD HOLD MOST OF ITS CURRENT SEATS, SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS WILL INCREASE THEIR WEST-MINSTER DELEGATION, THOUGH PROBABLY LESS DRAMATICALLY THAN THEY HAD HOPED, WHILE THE CONSERVATIVES WILL TAKE A REAL HIDING. LIBERALS ARE UNLIKELY TO MAKE ANY GAINS, BUT SHOULD HOLD THEIR THREE SEATS. MAJOR QUESTION APPEARS TO BE EXTENT OF ANTICIPATED COLLAPSE IN TORY VOTE AND WHETHER SNP OR LIBERALS WILL BE MAJOR BENEFICIARIES. OVER LONGER TERM THIS MEANS HMG WILL PLACE GREATER EMPHASIS ON SCOTTISH AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY

1. EMBOFF REVISITED GLASGOW/EDINBURGH AREAS OCTOBER 7-8, COVERING MUCH OF SAME GROUND AS EARLIER TRIP (REFTEL A). MOST STRIKING ASPECT OF CURRENT ELECTION OUTLOOK IS UNCERTAINTY. ALL OBSERVERS, INCLUDING SNP WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN EXTREMELY CONFIDENT OF AT LEAST DOUBLING ITS PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION TO 14, WERE MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS THAN WAS CASE EARLIER. REASONS FOR THIS CAUTION ARE THREEFOLD: EVIDENCE OF AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF UNDECIDED VOTERS ONLY A FEW DAYS BEFORE ELECTION (SCOTTISH OPINION POLLS INDICATE 15-20 PERCENT RESPONDENTS ARE UNDECIDED OR UNWILLING TO EXPRESS PREFERENCE); RANDOM NATURE OF APPARENT SHIFTS IN VOTER SENTIMENT (E.G. WEST LOTHIAN LABOR PARTY CANDIDATE REPORTS MARKED SWING TO SNP AMONG FORMERLY PRO-LABOR WORKING CLASS WIVES IN AT LEAST ONE COMMUNITY, CONSOLIDATION OF LABOR SUPPORT IN OTHER COMMUNITIES AND UNEXPECTED SWING TO LABOR IN SOME MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS); AND THE UNKNOWNNS STEMMING FROM COLLAPSE IN CONSERVATIVE VOTE IN SCOTLAND WHICH IS ANTICIPATED BY NEARLY ALL OBSERVERS.

2. LABOR PARTY REGIONAL ORGANIZER PETER ALLISON WAS ONE EXCEPTION TO GENERAL RULE. WHILE HE ACKNOWLEDGED ABOVE FACTORS, HE WAS OPTIMISTIC, ALBEIT CAUTIOUSLY, THAT LABOR WILL REALIZE NET GAIN OF TWO OR THREE SEATS. HE BELIEVES LABOR MAY LOSE TWO OR THREE SEATS TO SNP, BUT WILL MINIMIZE NET CHANGE BY TAKING ONE OR TWO SEATS FROM SNP. BEYOND THAT, HE BELIEVES LABOR WILL PICK UP LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FROM TWO TO FOUR SEATS FORMERLY HELD BY TORIES' ALTHOUGH T EXPECTS LIBERALS TO INCREASE TOTAL VOTE, HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THEY WILL GAIN ADDITIONAL SCOTTISH SEATS IN NEXT PARLIAMENT. ALLISON ASSERTS PRINCIPAL CHALLENGE FACING LABOR PARTY IN SCOTLAND IS THAT OF GETTING ITS SUPPORTERS TO POLLS AND IS QUITE CONCERNED IN THIS REGARD.

3. SNP CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR STEPHAN MAXWELL WAS NOTICEABLY

LESS OPTIMISTIC THAN BEFORE THAT SNP WILL MAKE DRAMATIC  
BREAKTHROUGH IN NUMBER OF SEATS. HOWEVER, HE STILL  
BELIEVES SNP STANDS VERY GOOD CHANCE TO EMERGE WITH 12  
TO 18 SEATS, AS COMPARED TO SEVEN IN LAST PARLIAMENT.  
HE STRESSED SIGNIFICANCE OF SHARP DETERIORATION IN TORY  
SUPPORT AND WAS CONFIDENT SNP RATHER THAN LIBERALS WOULD  
ATTRACT BULK OF THIS VOTE. HE WAS MORE CAUTIOUS REGARD-  
ING PROSPECTS FOR LABOR-HELD SEATS, BUT WAS OPTIMISTIC  
THAT SNP WOULD TAKE THREE, WITH A CHANCE AT THREE OR  
FOUR OTHERS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LABOR MIGHT REGAIN  
ONE OR TWO SEATS IT LOST IN FEBRUARY, HOWEVER. SNP HAS

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ALSO BEEN HEARTENED BY OPINION POLLS SHOWING THEM DIS-  
PLACING CONSERVATIVES AS SECOND PARTY IN SCOTLAND' BUT  
THESE SAME POLLS SHOW 75 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE REJECTS  
SEPARATISM IN FAVOR OF DEVOLUTION. AS A RESULT, SNP IS  
SEEKING TO DOWN PLAY ITS POSITION ON INDEPENDENCE WHILE  
OTHER PARTIES ARE FOCUSING THEIR ATTACKS ON THIS ISSUE.

4. DAVID SCOTT, WIDELY RESPECTED POLITICAL EDITOR OF  
DAILY SCOTSMAN, WAS ALSO EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO GUESS  
OUTCOME IN PRECISE TERMS. HE NOTED THAT IN FEBRUARY AT  
LEAST ONE SEEMINGLY SAFE MAJORITY OF 13,000 FOR LABOR  
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PARTY TURNED INTO 3,000 MAJORITY FOR SNP, AND THAT  
CURRENT VOLATILITY OF SCOTTISH ELECTORATE (HIS SOURCES  
TEND TO CONFIRM EXTREMELY HIGH NUMBER OF UNDECIDED VOTERS  
COULD PRODUCE SIMILAR RESULTS THIS TIME. NEVERTHELESS,  
SCOTT HAS IMPRESSION LABOR SUPPORT IS GENERALLY HOLDING  
FIRM, TORY SUPPORT IS ON VERGE OF TOTAL COLLAPSE AND SNP  
WILL BE MAJOR BENEFICIARY. AS WITH OTHER OBSERVERS, HE  
DOES NOT BELIEVE LIBERALS WILL GAIN SEATS IN SCOTLAND.  
VIEWS OF OTHER SCOTTISH OBSERVERS DID NOT VARY SIGNIFIC-  
ANTLY FROM THOSE OF SCOTT.

5. COMMENT: LABOR'S STRONG SHOWING ELSEWHERE IN BRITAIN  
HAS DIMINISHED SIGNIFICANCE OF ELECTION RESULTS IN SCOT-  
LAND WHICH EARLIER SEEMED PIVOTAL IF LABOR WAS TO GAIN  
PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. INDEED, ONE TRANSPORT HOUSE  
OFFICIAL PRIVATELY TOLD EMBOFF IT LOOKS AS THOUGH LABOR  
CAN AFFORD TO LOSE AS MANY AS FIVE SEATS TO SNP WITHOUT  
PREJUDICING ITS PROSPECTS FOR MAJORITY. GIVEN APPARENT  
VOLATILITY OF SCOTTISH ELECTORATE AND UNCERTAINTY OF  
ELECTION OUTCOME, LABOR HAS BEEN FORTUNATE. THERE IS  
LITTLE DOUBT SNP WILL REALIZE NET GAIN OF SEATS IN NEXT  
PARLIAMENT AND THAT IT MAY WELL BECOME PRINCIPAL REPOSI-  
TORY OF NON-SOCIALIST VOTE IN SCOTLAND. IN ANY EVENT,  
THEY WILL FORCE LONDON TO GIVE SCOTTISH AFFAIRS A HIGHER  
PRIORITY AND THAT, AFTER ALL, IS WHAT MOST SCOTS REALLY  
WANT.

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